



Comhairle Cathrach & Contae Phort Láirge
Waterford City & County Council

Starting



Your Residents Association

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Who will find this pack useful?

This pack has been produced for tenants of Waterford City and County Council that are either thinking of starting, or are in the process of setting up a Resident Association, existing Resident Associations and non local authority estates may also find some of the information useful.

Recognised Resident Associations have had many achievements and successes in enhancing the area they live in and improving the quality of life for the residents that they represent, some of the successes have included:

- Traffic calming within their estate
- Play areas instated or existing play area refurbished.
- Name plaques for their estate.
- Vandal resistant street lighting
- Estate clean ups
- Enhanced community spirit within the estate.
- Establishes a direct dialogue with the Council
- Successful social events
- Successful sports days
- Securing funding for administration costs, social events, estate improvements, insurance costs, and maintenance costs.

By working with Resident Associations the Council has learned more about what residents want, resulting in changes that benefits all.

This guide is laid out in a way that is easy to use and contains enough information to help you get a group established, or to point you in the direction of help, or further information if you need it.

The Community Support Officer

The Council has appointed Community Support Officers who work to ensure that residents' views are taken on board when decisions are being made about their estate. The Community Support Officer also offers residents help and support in establishing and running their own residents association. If you would like to have a chat with the Community Support Officer about setting up an association in your area then please contact Community Services 0761 102020.

What is a Residents association?

A Resident Association is a group of people living in an area who have come together to take up issues of common concern in relation to their community and general environment.

A Resident Association should be a democratic organisation, with clear aims, set up to meet the needs of the community that they are representing, A Resident Association works with the Council to help improve the quality of life for people that they represent. Informal meetings are hosted by the Resident Association that cover all sorts of issues that are of importance to those living in the area.

There are many reasons to set up Resident Associations, to list a few:

- ✓ Because you care about your home, your environment and the area you and your family live in.
- ✓ To gain a greater voice than an individual.
- ✓ Can help you get involved in decision-making that may affect your home.
- ✓ A Resident Association establishes a direct dialogue with your Council.
- ✓ A Resident Association works to improve the quality of life for the people it represents.
- ✓ Working together as a group on general improvements to your estate helps build a better community spirit.
- ✓ There is a social side also; the with the help of the residents organises various social events and activities during the year, these events leads to neighbours getting to know each other better and sharing some real quality time together.

Setting up a Resident Association can also be enlightening experience and can provide you with some real results in your local area; it can also be hard work but provide you with a fun and worthwhile experience.

What do Resident Associations do?

Each is set up in response to different circumstances, for example,

- To help improve communications with the council and other local agencies
- To work together on issues of common concern
- Works towards building a better community spirit in the estate
- Organising social activities, estate events
- Secure funding from the council for estate improvements.
- A Resident Association brings forward the views of the residents that they represent.

Some simple steps to getting a Resident Association started.

- All you need to get started is a small group of residents and a venue to meet in someone's living room, a community room or a church hall, are just a couple of suggestions.
- Have a chat together and get a clear idea of what you are hoping to achieve
- Get in touch with your Community Support Officer for support and advice.
- Take your idea out to the wider area – if you are to be a credible group then you need to give everyone the chance to get involved, regardless of age, gender or race, you must include every house in the estate.

- This can be done with a flier or poster, inviting residents to a meeting – your Community Support Officer can help you with design and printing if needed.
- Make sure that you have a venue that is easily accessible for residents and that the meeting is held at a time when people can attend.
- Use the meeting to gauge support to establish a residents association, advise people on the benefits of having a residents association to represent their estate on issues of common concern.
- If enough support is shown at the meeting, your next step is to
 - Elect a committee to progress the work of the group – all you need is a Chairperson, Secretary and a Treasurer.
 - Agree a written set of rules for your group to abide by. This set of rules is known as a constitution. Having a clear constitution should help to prevent disagreements from arising within the group later on. A model constitution has been included which may help you in developing your own constitution.

Practical help for your group

Have a chat with your Community Support Officer – tell them what support you need for your group and see what help they can offer you. Support may be in the form of

- Providing stationery to get you started
- Photocopying, printing, postage etc
- General advice
- Advice on seeking funding from the council for the association
- Your Community Support Officer will facilitate your first meeting if needed.

Financial assistance for your association

Your association may be eligible for a start up grant if

- Committee members were democratically elected
- A clear constitution that is recognised by the Council is adopted by the association.
- It has opened a bank or building society account in the name of the association.
- It has a clear plan of what the association is trying to achieve
- It has submitted an application to the council outlining what your group plan to spend the funding on.
- Minutes of Annual General Meeting must be submitted with grant application

What is a constitution?

A constitution is a formal document, adopted by the association that states the aims and objectives of the association and how the association will be run

- Outline the aims of the group and who it is representing
- Set the geographical boundaries of the group by stating what area the association represents
- Detail on how decisions will be made
- Confirm who can join the group
- Confirm how often the group will meet
- State when your Annual General Meeting will be held

The benefits of a constitution

- It lets everyone know what the association is about
- It helps to prevent future misunderstandings
- It helps the association to be taken seriously
- It may open the door for funding from different organisations

Please forward a copy of the constitution to your Community Support Officer.

If you want some advice on how to put together a constitution then have a word with your Community Support Officer who will be happy to offer you some help.

To get the Council to recognise your constitution the association must have

- Regular meetings including an A.G.M.
- Regular elections
- Open financial records and annual accounts
- An agreed minimum number of active members (the quorum)
- Procedures to make information on the association widely available to the community it serves
- Open membership to all residents on the estate it represents

Sample Constitution for Resident Associations

Name of the organisation

- The name of the organisation shall be

Aims of the organisation

- To promote the interests of all residents in
- To represent the views of the above people.
- To promote social activities for all members of the community.
- To make the area a better, safer, cleaner and happier place to be.
- To work with and assist in the work of the local Neighbourhood Watch Scheme.
- The association shall remain non-political.
- To promote the work of the group by keeping the residents in its catchment area informed of its activities
- To develop and review an annual list of objectives so that the group remains clear in what it is trying to achieve

Membership

- Membership of the Association shall be open, regardless of race, religion, nationality, age, disability, or political views, to residents of
.....
- Each household shall be limited to one vote.

Membership fee/subscription

- Membership is free to everyone who lives within the area covered by the Association.

The Committee

- A committee shall be elected to carry out the business of the Association.
- The committee shall consist of a Secretary, Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and Treasurer.
- The committee shall be elected at the Annual General Meeting. Membership of the committee is open to all residents of Residents Association, regardless of their race, religion, nationality, age, disability, or political views.

- Officers shall carry out the duties given to them at General Meetings.
- The committee shall meet once every or as and when deemed necessary.
- Any committee member who fails to attend three consecutive meetings without sending apologies shall be deemed to have resigned from the committee.
- The committee may co-opt new members as required by election at the main meetings.
- Minutes of committee meetings shall be available to all members upon request.
- A copy of this constitution shall be made available to any member upon written request.

Annual General Meetings

- There shall be an Annual General Meeting held every at which the committee will report on its work and present a statement of accounts.
- The Annual General Meeting shall elect a new committee, vote on any recommendations and any amendments to this constitution.
- The secretary will notify all residents of the dates of the meeting not less than 14 days before such meeting.
- Any proposals submitted to the secretary in writing not less than 7 days in advance of the meeting shall be discussed

Other General Meetings

- There shall be a general meeting open to all residents on a monthly basis until such times as the Committee considers it necessary to vary this time arrangement.
- A special general meeting open to all members will be held if 8 or more members submit in writing a request for such meeting to the Secretary. The Secretary shall arrange for the meeting to take place within 21 days.
- The Secretary will notify all members of all general meetings at least 5 days in advance.

Quorum

- No general or annual general meeting shall take place if less than _____ Members are present.
- No committee meeting shall take place if less than half of the committee are present.

Finance

- The Treasurer shall open a bank or building society account in the name of the Association. Not less than three of four authorised signatories, (of which one of the three will be the Treasurer), shall be required to withdraw or transfer any funds from the account. All monies received, cash or cheques shall be banked into the Association's account as soon as is practicable.

- All expenditure shall be agreed by a decision at a general meeting or committee meeting. However, a small float not to exceed €30 may be retained for basic stationery etc. All receipts must be retained.
- The Treasurer shall keep written records of all monies received and spent and shall produce a written finance report for every residents association meeting.

Changes to the Constitution

- The constitution may be altered or amended at any Annual General Meeting, General or Special Meeting.
- Any suggested changes must be presented to the Secretary 14 days before such a meeting.
- Changes must be agreed by at least two thirds of the members present at that meeting.

Dissolution

- The Association may only be dissolved at a Special General Meeting called for the purpose and must be advertised at least 14 days prior to such meeting.
- A proposal to dissolve the Association shall take effect only if agreed by at least two thirds of the members present at such meeting.
- Funds and possessions of the Association will be disposed of according to the wishes of the meeting.

For and on behalf of Residents Association

Chairperson:

Secretary:

Who does what? Advice for committee members

Running a residents association and meetings need not be a complicated business. There are four main roles within the group to ensure that meetings run smoothly, bills are paid and work progresses. These are the roles of:

- The Chairperson
- The Vice-chairperson
- The Secretary
- The Treasurer

The role of the Chairperson is to...

- Lead the group to ensure that it meets its stated aims
- Ensure that the meetings are orderly and keep to the agenda
- Ensure that volunteers carry out the tasks that they have offered to do
- Meet with the Secretary to prepare agendas and discuss any correspondence
- Represent the group at other meetings
- Ensure that everyone knows when and where meetings are
- Work with the secretary by ensuring – the sending out of the minutes from the previous meeting about a week before the next meeting as a good reminder
- Refer to the last minutes to ensure that everyone is doing what he or she should
- Ensure that the meeting is updated on developments.
- Talk to the Secretary about any mail received and to the Treasurer about the finances.
- Encourage people to contact them before the next meeting if they want something to be discussed or added to the agenda.

The role of the Vice Chairperson is to...

- Carry out the role of the Chairperson in their absence

What the Chairperson should do before and during the meeting

- Make sure that the room is set up
- Make a point of welcoming people as they arrive, particularly those that are new or don't show up so often
- Make sure that you have a quorum – the minimum number of people required to make any decisions binding

Running the Meeting

- Your agenda should act as a prompt for introducing each item
- Invite the relevant person to speak and then afterwards ask for any comments from the rest of the attendees
- People wishing to comment should do so by raising their hand. They should then wait for the Chairperson to invite them to talk. This ensures that the meeting is kept orderly and everyone gets a fair chance to talk.
- If people start talking amongst themselves then remind them that there is only one meeting going on and invite them to participate in that
- Gently bring people back to the point if the discussion wanders
- Encourage the quiet ones to have their say and those that could talk for hours to keep it brief
- Rule out of order any racist, sexist or personal attack on any individual. It is important not to let such behaviour go unchallenged

The role of the Secretary

The job of the secretary is an important and varied one. The Secretary works closely with the Chairperson to ensure that the business of the group runs smoothly. The Secretary can receive help from other volunteers to get the work done if needed. Their duties are:

- Taking minutes of meetings – the written record of what was discussed. Minutes are a valuable tool for keeping track of decisions made
- Sending out notices of when and where meetings are to take place
- Meeting with the Chairperson to prepare agendas
- Receiving and replying to correspondence for the association
- Keeping any relevant records for the association.

Tips for taking the minutes

- During the meeting only take notes – write them up properly later on
- You may want to sit next to the Chairperson so that you can see who is talking
- It is helpful to give the items in the minutes the same numbers as they are on the agenda
- Remember that accurate minutes are more important than correct spelling and grammar

What the minutes should include

- The place, time and date of the meeting
- Who chaired the meeting and who took the minutes should be recorded
- All agenda items discussed and decisions made
- If someone agreed to be responsible for carrying out any action then record their names and what they were supposed to do
- Record only the major points of the discussion – don't be tempted to try and write absolutely everything down!
- Record any votes taken. How many votes for, against or abstained
- Record the time that the meeting ended

Tips for drawing up an agenda

Items are put on agendas for one of three reasons:

- Information only
- Discussion
- Decision

When you have collected together the things that are to be on the agenda, list them down as follows

<u>Name</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Estimated time</u>
John	Vandalism	Discuss	10 minutes
Emily	AGM date	Decision	5 minutes
Bob	Panel update	Information	15 minutes

When you have done the whole list you will need to ask yourself:

- Is there enough time to cover everything or will some item need to be dropped?
- In what order should the issues be put on to the agenda?

A suggested logical order for your agenda items is

- Attendance and apologies – who is present and who could not attend?
- Acceptance of minutes to the last meeting – are they correct? If not what amendments will need to be required before they are accepted? Any amendments should be written on to the end of the minutes and signed by the chairperson. Ask for two people to propose and second acceptance of the minutes
- Updates from the last meeting – did everyone do what they were supposed to?
- Any major items should be heard on their own as a specific agenda item
- Any other business – relevant issues that people want to raise urgently but there has been no time to ask for them to be included on the agenda
- Date of next meeting

The role of the Treasurer

- This is the person that has overall responsibility for the finances.
- The Treasurer will be required to give regular updates to the Committee

They will need to:

- Keep all banking information under close security – including cheque books, paying books and bank statements
- Keep a record of all money coming in and going out of the association
- Paying bills and issuing receipts
- Keep petty cash and a system for recording day-to-day monies spent
- Remember – the money belongs to the association so the group needs to approve spending
- It is always a good idea to have three approved signatories for cheques, with each cheque needing to be signed by two out of the three

How to get people interested and to stay interested

Be realistic - don't try to do too much too soon. Even small successes at this stage can help build confidence and get more people interested.

- Keep all your members informed not just those who attend.
- Get some social events underway at an early stage.
- Find out what skills members have and use them.
- Get access to a typewriter/personal computer and a photocopier
- Keep proper minutes and financial records.
- Don't allow people with strong personalities to dominate.
- Make sure that people share their knowledge and skills with all members of the association.
- Record and celebrate successes perhaps through fliers
- Take time out to compliment yourselves when things go right, and don't dwell too much on the negative
- Try and make the venue friendly.
- Try and arrange a date and time suitable for the people you want to attract.
- Ensure publicity is done well in advance. Make sure that any handouts or displays are accurate and eye catching.
- Try and appoint someone to be responsible for the publicity of your residents group.

Fundraising tips

When you have decided what your group wants to achieve, you need to work out if money is needed to do it. If it is, then you can begin to plan how you will get the money together. There are a number of ways to do this.

The first, and perhaps the most popular way groups raise money is by organising a fund-raising event themselves. These can be social events, raffles, jumble sales, coffee mornings, treasure hunts, etc.

These events do more than just raise money for the group, they are also enjoyable (which may encourage more people to become members), they can gain publicity for your association – helping you to promote the work of your association.

Gardai permission needs to be sought for street collections or collections in pubs. In certain circumstances, a licence needs to be obtained for raffles or bingo – check with the Council well in advance of your event, to see if you need a licence.

Planning the event is very important. The bigger the event, the more time and effort it takes to organise. It might be better to hold a series of smaller, less ambitious events, than one very large one. This is particularly true if your association only has a few people able to do all the work involved!

Whether you are organising a jumble sale or a sponsored walk, the secret of success is in the planning process. This needs to be thought through carefully, and should take place well before the event itself.

All the publicity material you produce should state clearly who is holding the event, what the money raised will be used for, and the date, time and place.

Here is a checklist of questions that should be discussed by the committee to make the event run smoothly:

- What resources do we have to hold the event?
- How many people will be needed
- Are we seeking help from outside the association?
- Will outside agencies (e.g. shops) want publicity for the event?
- Is there someone who can take photographs for future publicity?
- Is there a suitable venue?
- Is anything else going on in the area on the day we have chosen, which may make our event less successful?
- Are there people 'in reserve' who we can call on in the event of someone falling ill or being unavailable?
- Will we need any kind of licence or permission for the event?
- Who will be in charge of money raised?
- Is there a safe place to keep the money until it can be banked?
- Who will write thank you letters after the event?

It is a good idea to keep notes of what has been decided and who will carry out the various tasks, so that someone can check that things are going according to plan.

Finally, after the event has taken place don't forget to thank all the volunteers who have put in a lot of hard work – they will be more likely to take part in future fund-raising events if their work and effort have been recognised and rewarded. You could do this by writing to them personally, or by writing to the local newspaper.